

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE

ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK: COVID-19 RESPONSE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 The report is intended to inform Audit Committee members about the mechanisms in place to provide assurance in respect of the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.2 The assurance framework utilises existing mechanisms including risk management, internal control assessment and governance policies and systems.
- 1.3 An evaluation on the effectiveness of the Council's response will be included in the Annual Governance Statement for 2019/20.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The UK Government published an action plan on 3 March 2020 setting what is known about the virus, the planning that has been done for an infectious disease outbreak, actions taken so far in response to the current coronavirus outbreak, what is being planned for next, depending on the course the outbreak takes and the role the public has in supporting the response.
- 2.2 Appendix A summarises the national and local responsibilities for pandemic preparedness and response. This provides the context to the Council's role in response to current coronavirus pandemic.
- 2.3 As part of the Council's civil contingencies responsibilities, preparedness for responding to emergencies is considered at two level depending on the nature of critical event or emergency. The Council's Business Continuity arrangements were put in place following the government's action plan being published. This mechanisms provides the governance for local decision making on service delivery prioritisation. The second mechanism is the Council's role on the Humber Local Resilience Forum (LRF). Emergency status was declared by the LRF mid-March 2020.

- 2.4 Following the UK Government's announcement on 23 March for a UK-wide partial lockdown, to contain the spread of the virus, Royal Assent was received for two major pieces of legislation: Coronavirus Act 2020 and Health Protection (England) Regulations 2020 to enable the restrictions to be implemented and enforced.
- 2.5 The Council took necessary actions to implement legislative changes and respond to changes in government guidance. In respect of providing assurance as to the effectiveness of the response a section of narrative will be included in the Annual Governance Statement. This will focus on the following areas which are based upon guidance from Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy:
- Impact on business as usual in the delivery of services;
 - New areas of activity as part of national response and any governance issues arising;
 - The funding and logistical consequences of delivering the local government response; and
 - Assessment of the longer term disruption consequences arising from the coronavirus pandemic.
- 2.6 Mechanisms that are in place to obtain the necessary assurance have been incorporated into the Annual Governance Statement process. Sources of evidence will include:
- The Risk Register related to Covid-19
 - Directors Assurance Statements - a section on COVID has been added.
 - Consideration via evidence based self-assessment checklists on how the Council has responded to the new activities and any governance issues arising from them.
 - Relevant reports to the executive including Cabinet, Cabinet Member and Officer delegated decisions relating to COVID.
- 2.7 Latest national guidance has been published following the Prime Ministers statement on 10 May 2020 and the UK Government's Recovery Strategy 'Our Plan to Re-build'. This includes 'Working Safely during coronavirus', which provides guidance on how workplaces can be as safe as possible. At the time of writing the report officers are assessing this guidance and updating risk assessment processes and sign off. The details of this will also form part of the assurance statement evidence.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 To note the content of the report and confirm that the assurance mechanisms set out will provide the Audit Committee with the necessary information to demonstrate that the Council has responded within its powers and available resources.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 This report provides the context to enable the Audit Committee to receive assurance reporting in respect of COVID-19 response.

4.2 The evaluation will be presented to the Audit Committee as part of the Annual Governance Statement, for which the committee is responsible for reviewing and recommending for approval.

5. FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)

5.1 There are no additional resource implications associated with this report

6. OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)

6.1 The AGS provides an evaluation as to the effectiveness of the council's arrangements for acting with integrity and within the rule of the law; ensuring openness and engagement with stakeholders; defining outcomes in terms of social, economic and environmental benefits and determining interventions aligned to priorities and effective utilisation of resources

7. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

7.1 An Integrated Impact Assessment is not required for this report.

8. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

8.1 No identified conflicts of interest. The AGS and assurance evaluation regarding COVID-19 response will be informed by the relevant director delegations and responsibilities.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 That Audit Committee note the mechanism for reporting assurance in respect of the Council's COVID-19 response.

9.2 That the Audit Committee consider and agree any additional areas of assurance relating to the coronavirus outbreak to be included in future reports.

DIRECTOR: GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report –

The Annual Governance Statement for 2019/20 Matters to consider as a result of the coronavirus pandemic: Briefing from the CIPFA Better Governance Forum

Appendix 1 – Responsibilities for pandemic preparedness and response

Organisation/Body	Responsibility/Role
National	
Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC)	Lead UK Government department with responsibility for responding to risk posed by pandemic.
UK Chief Medical Officers	Provide public health advice to the system and government.
Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)	Responsible for ensuring that a single source of scientific advice to decision makers on COBR (Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms).
NHS	Works in partnership with Local Resilience Forums on pandemic preparedness and response delivery in healthcare systems.
Public Health England	<p>Provides specialist technical expertise to support both planning and delivery arrangements in England, working closely with public health agencies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.</p> <p>NHS and PHE have developed plans for coordinating the response at a national level and supporting local responders through their regional structures.</p> <p>PHE lead the provision of expert advice on health protection issues and actively contributes to the planning and delivery of a multi-agency response. PHE provides health protection services, expertise and advice, delivering specialist public health services to UK national and local government (in England), the NHS/HSCNI and the public, working in partnership to protect the public against infectious diseases.</p>
DHSC, PHE and NHSE	Tri-partite partnership provides strategic oversight and direction for the health and adult social care response to an influenza pandemic, with Department for Education (DfE) leading on the children's social care response.

Organisation/Body	Responsibility/Role
Local/Regional	
<p>In England and Wales, local organisations (working jointly through the Local Resilience Forums and Local Health Resilience Partnerships in England) have the primary responsibility for planning for and responding to any major emergency, including a pandemic. Local Authorities are key partners on LRF</p>	
<p>Multi-agency working at both a national and local level ensures joint planning between all organisations. A coordinated approach to ensure best use of resources to achieve the best outcome for the local area.</p>	
NHS England and NHS Improvement	With partners have published a series of quick guides to assist multi-agency working and support local health and care systems manage increasing demand on their services.
Social Care	Is provided by a diverse range of local authority, private and third sector bodies. It is important that the role of social care provision in all sectors is central to contingency planning. Social care providers should remain in contact with local commissioners and resilience partners, review their business continuity plans and continue to practice proper infection control and good respiratory hygiene practice.
Other Key Public services	
The Ministry of Justice's HM Courts & Tribunal Service	Have well established plans to deliver key services to protect the public and maintain confidence in the justice system.